

CHRONICLE



2019

Andrew Woodmaker

**A journey to the truth,
leads to a departure for new pastures.**

In this sixth year's worth of entries from a diary stored on a futuristic recording device found after a house fire, an investigation into an international secret will have unexpected consequences.

In 2019, the election is on in the UK, but can the government reap the rewards of their recent military victory?

Andrew Woodmaker finds his life heading in the right direction once more, but will his ambition to discover the truth lead to more than he can handle?

Nobody knows if this is a work of fiction or a true record of how things happened, and will happen. By reading the diary, some things may have already begun to change, and the future is not what it was.

But it could be that this is how it would have been.

CHRONICLE 2019

by

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Edited from recording device by

Michael Simms

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Dedicated to CatMonster

She's the best at stopping me working.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Tuesday, January 1st to Saturday, January 5th 2019

I think I must be getting old, I managed to sleep through the New Year's fireworks. First time I can ever remember doing that. I just sat on the sofa, NewCat was curled up purring on me, and suddenly it was 4am. I consoled myself with the New York fireworks, but it wasn't the same.

Then again, the London fireworks really aren't the same either without the London Eye. I reckon they should rebuild it, twice as big, that'd teach the terrorists a lesson.

I napped on and off for most of the morning, till about 11, when I really thought I should get up and try and not waste my last day off.

I've made a couple of New Year's resolutions. One is for work, one is for personal life.

No, we've been through this before, I'm not going to tell you what they are till I actually get to do them. That way, if I don't do them, I'll just claim victory at the end of the year on something I did do, and you'll never know the difference.

So don't ask again! :-)

There was some good TV on New Year's Day, although it probably wasn't quite to the taste of most of the TV watching public. They had some shots from inside the Bigelow orbital hotel, and we got to see all of the visitors preparing to return to Earth. Their faces had been blurred out for privacy, but we got to see around the hotel. It wasn't luxurious, but it wasn't sparse either. There were TV screens, what looked to be some kind of zero gravity sports game, and a couple of exercise bikes which were bizarrely placed on a wall, but I guess when there's no gravity, who cares which surface they're on. They had some plants growing up there too, although I think the poor things were a bit confused as they were just growing wildly in all directions.

I'll go up there one day and see it for myself. Someday.

In the evening the news had more polls for the election. Polls on

New Year's Day, I thought that that was a bit much to be honest. Can't we have just one day off from politics? They were pretty much unchanged since the last polling data, so it was nothing to write home about. They could have waited a day.

And then it was evening and I needed to think about going back to work in the morning. I was grateful it was a short week, just three days. I really really wasn't in the mood to go back, I wanted another week off first.

The first day back was like all first days back after a long break. Nobody did any work, myself included. I sat at my desk, mostly just browsing news feeds and online forums, I wasn't massively desperate to write anything. I did put together a bit of an article outline for a piece about the space hotel, but just an outline, nothing printable. I have no idea how we actually managed to get a paper out, I didn't see anyone actually doing anything. I guess it was full of adverts and articles from the feeds. I don't know, I didn't even read it.

I did do a whole article on Thursday, after I picked up a report from the local council website that the Thames had been declared free of toxins and was now safe for swimming in, and for pets to go back into. This was pretty cool news, and it gave me a nice feeling to know it was my work that had led to the poisoning stopping. It was a good way to start the new year, reaping the success from the previous year.

Friday morning on the train, I spotted Amanda, the lawyer I'm trying to get leads from, at the other end of the carriage. I squeezed my way through the crush of people and waved. She smiled and waved back, and we wished each other a Happy New Year.

I asked her how the jewellery shop robbery case had gone, and she grinned ear to ear. She'd won the case, and the culprits had been put away for three years each.

I congratulated her, and she beamed. 'First of many, I hope,' I said, and she nodded.

'It had better be, I was a bit disheartened when I lost my first two cases, but winning this one was brill.'

The train was pulling up to Oxford by this point, so I didn't want

to press her for new leads in the last thirty seconds of the journey. I decided to just leave it at that, a friendly encounter that would leave her in a positive mood for our next discussion. Calculating, yeah I know, but she does the same, getting me to do the robbery article for her. It's all good, we should both get good value out of the acquaintance.

And then before I knew it, it was the end of the week, and I was back home and having a relaxing Saturday.

All weeks should be like this. All of them.

Except the ones with only one or two workdays, I like those even better.

Sunday, January 6th to Saturday, January 12th 2019

I really had to fight the urge to get *another* new PS4 on Sunday. I was a bit bored and not wanting to do anything that I had available in the house, so I hovered over the 'buy it now' button on Amazon for a while, before finally telling myself not to. I reckon, with my keen sense of intuition that all members of the press have, that there will be a PS5 or something to follow up on the Xbox One before too long, so I'd feel like a bit of a twonk if I bought one just before a new one was announced.

Instead I satisfied my urge to buy something by getting a lenstop app that morphed things I saw into other things. It was quite bizarre, kindof like how I imagine tripping is. It gave CoNN a hat as he wandered round, and when I looked out of the window I could see some rather strange looking beanstalk heading up into the clouds. I stopped using it though when I saw a spider and I wasn't sure if it was real or not. It was, so I sent CoNN in to deal with it.

That's the problem with my electronic eye. It's too low resolution to identify things well, and so I'd need to lean right up close to the spider to be able to see it properly with that eye. I was never going to get that close to a spider, so, off went the app.

Monday back at work started off well. Miranda Dobson was back in the office after a slightly longer Christmas break than the rest of us, and I made a point of saying hi to her as soon as I walked in. Of course, she'd beaten me into the office, most people beat me into the office on Monday mornings. She seemed pleased to see me and said hi back, and we chatted for a while about our respective Christmas breaks, before I thought I'd better get to my desk and do a bit of work.

My first article of the day did a good job of souring the good morning, unfortunately. Uganda was doing its best to prove that whatever the US government can do in homophobia, they can do better.

Uganda passes capital homophobic law

In a decision that seems more like the dark ages than the modern world, Uganda's government has today passed a law that makes it punishable by death to perform a homosexual act.

Even the US government, who in 2017 made gay marriage illegal in their country, denounced the move as barbaric, and the pope has called instead for "re-education instead of punishment."

With an estimated 4-6% of the world's population being gay or bisexual, this would imply that the Ugandan government plan to execute up to two million people for their genetic predispositions, an act which would be classified as a crime against humanity by the United Nations.

Ugandan politician David Bahati, the original sponsor of the bill, has recently resigned his parliamentary seat and fled the country, after being found naked in the company of two male prostitutes, who he claimed had been holding him there, in his own bedroom, against his will.

The government of South Sudan, Uganda's northern neighbour, has claimed to be watching the outcome of the new law with interest, in the hope of implementing a similar law in the future.

Gay rights groups have criticised both the new law, and the comments of the pope, pointing out that sexual orientation is a genetic trait, and all that so called “re-education” does is to force people to live their lives in a way that will make them suppress what is natural to them, a situation that leads to thousands of suicides worldwide every year.

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I won't bother to point out that this is one of the stupidest things I've ever heard, or comment how barbaric and medieval it is, you know this already. Let's just hope the people in power who voted in this law are soon out of power, and the next government can overturn it.

In better news on Monday, NASA announced that the *Landis* Venus rover had finished analysing a second soil sample from its location, and had come up with the same inconclusive result as the first sample. As such, they'd started to move the rover towards a set of rocks which seemed to display a different geology, according to images taken from the rover's lander as it approached the surface.

The rover's primary goal is to determine why Venus isn't covered in craters, when it seems to have no plate tectonics to renew its landmasses through volcanic and seismic activity. It's hoped that discovering this will lead to a better understanding of Earth's geology.

NASA have said that at its top speed, the *Landis* rover will reach the new testing location in around twenty days time, which means I don't have to wait long till I can do another article on it.

It was a much more relaxing day on Tuesday. I spent the morning in Reading for a change. We're supposed to be the Oxford *and* Reading Daily, and I almost never go to Reading. The company's top management had sent an email round at the start of the year asking if people could try and pay some attention to Reading, as readership over there was falling, largely due to our lack of good local content.

I really have no idea of my way round Reading, I've only been there a few times and I got lost each time, so I just hung around at the train station area and asked people about all things local. I got a few ideas for articles, but I didn't dare venture into town. I heard that the

last reporter that did that was never seen again...

In the afternoon I went back to the office, and did some article outlines for a Reading story. I was going to write about the issues with delays on local train services. What a surprise, I'd hung out around the train station, and that's what a lot of people were moaning about, who'd have thunk it?

I didn't write about it, but on Thursday, the Ugandan government executed twelve people for being gay. I knew if I wrote about what they'd done, I'd end up being torn a new one by my editor, Andrew, as there is no way I'd even try and make it a fair and balanced piece. And so I held my tongue, and did my train article for Reading instead.

I ended up, coincidentally - or maybe not if she arranged it - walking out of the office at the same time as Miranda. As we got into the car park, I thought, what the hell, and asked her if she felt like grabbing a drink at the Starbucks across the street. She looked at her watch, and said she'd like that, but it couldn't be a long one, as she had to get home.

So, we headed over, and went in for coffee. I usually drink tea, but I do think the coffee there is much nicer than the other coffee places in town, so I've been drinking there more often than usual. I think they've upped their game in the last few months, it wasn't that great when I was in there in November, but since then, it's really improved. Maybe they're adding chocolate to it without telling me, that may explain it.

Anyway, we sat and chatted away for a while. We tried to avoid talking about news, so I talked about life in the ever exciting metropolis of Didcot. That took a whole 30 seconds, and so we moved on to other topics pretty quickly. After our first drink, we stayed for a second drink, talking about astronomy. It turns out she's a big fan of astronomy, and she has her own telescope. That was impressive, I like astronomy but I've always been an armchair fan, not an active observer. She told me she'd been taking photos of the Andromeda galaxy with her telescope, and she showed me the pictures on her Facebook account. They were pretty cool, I have to say. I was really impressed.

After two cups though she checked her watch and had to go. She explained she'd have happily stayed longer, but she had to feed her cat, who's diabetic and so needs to be fed at regular times, and given injections.

I nodded and said we'd have to do it again sometime, and she smiled and agreed.

I left her heading back to the office car park to retrieve her car, and I headed off to the train station. I'd never heard of a diabetic cat before, I always thought it was just something that overweight people got, but apparently not. From what I read up on my train home, it happens in cats, and not just in overweight people either, although that does make it more likely.

I'd learned something new. Medicine has never been my strong point, I always hated anything to do with biology at school.

Friday on the train, I was sitting across from Amanda again. I said hi, and she said hi, and went back to looking confused at her paperwork she was reading. She had that look of 'it makes no sense,' and so I asked what was up.

'Oh, my next case, it's an insurance fraud case, and I can guarantee you that this guy will get away with it, because none of us can work out how he managed to steal over a hundred grand. We know he did it, but, he's done it in such a way that it's so complicated you'd need a PhD. in stupidly complex insurance law to be able to figure it out.'

I sympathised, and said I was afraid I couldn't help with that one, not much a journalist can do to figure out something like that.

She nodded. 'Thanks anyway, I appreciate your asking,' and went back to her paperwork.

About lunchtime I kicked myself. I know an insurance expert that needs a job.

That evening, I banged on Gerald and Simon's door and when they let me in, I asked Gerald if it was the kind of thing he thought he may be interested in, and if I should give Amanda his name.

He was thrilled at the prospect, and gave me a hug on the way out. I think he's been unemployed for so long now he's stopped looking

for work and slipped into that malaise of thinking he's unemployable. The kind of attitude that *makes* you unemployable.

I told him I'd talk to Amanda as soon as I next saw her on the train. It may not happen and even if it does, it could only be a few days work, but he didn't care. Anything was better than nothing.

Sunday, January 13th to Saturday, January 19th 2019

Sunday was a bit of a disappointment, as the *Landis* rover on Venus failed sometime overnight. There was a report on TV about it in the morning, and NASA reckons that the rover may have developed a hairline fracture in the heat casing while moving, which led to some of the internals frying. So, it's gone. I don't know if they'll count the mission as a success or a failure. It lasted longer than they expected, it analysed all the samples it was supposed to analyse, but it didn't give them a definitive answer to the question it was meant to answer. I guess it's still a success in many ways though.

On Monday on the train, I hunted down Amanda and told her I may have a solution to her problem. I told her about Gerald, and it looked like I was about to get my second hug for being an effective middle man, but she didn't, thankfully. She looked really pleased with the idea, and dpushed her business card to me, which I forwarded on to Gerald.

I do like modern technology, he'd already called her before I got off the train, and it was all done, he'd be catching the next train into Oxford that morning.

It definitely set the week off on the right foot, starting with a good deed to help out a friend *and* a business associate, even though it meant I did miss the gym that morning to make sure I was on the right train. I'd have been irked if Amanda had caught a different train that morning though, and I'd missed the gym for nothing. I'm actually starting to get the hang of this whole swimming lark.

I went into the gym on Tuesday instead. I'm up to doing 40 lengths each visit now, which is a lot more than I was managing when

I started going. I think my first visit I managed about six or something pathetic. I'm not the slowest in the pool either, although I'm certainly still in the bottom 10%, but I feel a certain sense of victory in not being a complete failure at swimming.

Yeah, I take my successes where I can, even the small ones.

There were new polls in on Wednesday. I'm hoping these polls come out regularly, as I can start to get into doing a regular piece on them, although I expect I'm not the only person in the office who wants to cover the election.

Latest polls: Labour gains ground on Tories

In the latest poll by Gallup, the Labour party has gained three points on the Conservatives, after promising to freeze all spending cuts on unemployment benefits for at least two years if elected.

The Conservatives have called the plan reckless, and claimed it would inevitably lead to tax rises to pay for the added expense for the growing numbers of unemployed, which reached 19.6% at the beginning of the year.

Support for UKIP has dropped by two points, while in a surprise result the Science Party has climbed by three percent, showing a possible dissatisfaction with the policies of the main parties. Analysis of the numbers shows that many Liberal Democrat voters, who abandoned the party in droves after their announcement over the Falklands last year, are turning to the Science Party as the protest vote of choice.

With just 8% of the electorate describing themselves as undecided, it seems that the Conservatives are likely to ride their Falklands victory into another term in government.

Gallup poll results: Conservative 43%, Labour 29%, UKIP 11%, Science 5%, Lib Dems 2%, other 2%, undecided 8%

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That was a tactically written article from me, if you didn't spot it. I want the Science Party to win, but instead of talking them up, which would be absurd as they have a 5% share, I positioned them as a good way to protest vote. I think there are a lot of protest voters out there, so it may help to make them think about Science as a valid alternative.

Or maybe I'm overestimating how many people will read the article.

There was a nice new bit of science news on Wednesday, though I'm not quite sure what the point of it is yet.

The Helmholtz Centre in Germany have announced that they've successfully synthesised the first new element to be confirmed as discovered in the last 6 years. Ununennium, element 119, which is a name I believe will change now they've confirmed its existence.

It's apparently highly radioactive, and has a half life of less than a second, and so the few molecules they managed to synthesise didn't last long. The surprise for the scientists was that Ununennium is a liquid at room temperature, which makes it only the third element to have this property, along with Bromine and Mercury. (Are you impressed I know all this? I got it all for the article I did on it, I'm not really a chemist, don't worry). It's also the first radioactive room temperature liquid to be discovered.

So, all in all, cool. What're they going to do with it? Nobody knows. It's just there, it's a discovery. Then again, who knows, maybe it'll have some awesome property that'll be amazing in the future. After all, nobody knew what to do with electricity or radio when they were first discovered.

Thursday afternoon, Miranda was the one to suggest another coffee after work. We spent an hour and a half in Starbucks talking about things we like, things we don't. We both seem to have a fairly decent overlap of entertainment types we enjoy. We both like books and films, though she likes music more than I do, and I think I like films more than she does.

As she did last week, she had to leave moderately early to go sort out her cat, so I headed off home to have a bit of a think. She seems nice, we've obviously got a fair bit to talk about, so we have a decent compatibility there. She's highly attractive, but I really can't use that as a basis for anything because lets face it, after the bomb, I'm certainly not. I wasn't a male model before, but now I get calls from Hollywood to do monster films because it saves them a fortune on makeup. I think I'd like to spend a bit more time getting to know her before really considering taking it any further, but, so far so good.

We'll see. See how it goes, it could end up just fizzling out, but it may well end up fizzling in, you never know.

On Saturday, Gerald and Simon knocked on my door and dragged me out to buy me dinner at the local Chinese. Gerald is now officially working for the law firm of Reese, Snyder, Terry, and Nolan. They've taken him on as a permanent specialist on insurance, to help them with the cases they've always had to turn down in the past. He's already looking so much more cheerful. Simon's looking a lot more relaxed too, I think the tension may have been getting to both of them with only having the one wage in the family. I know how that can be, Taima used to be difficult when she was unemployed and I had the job at the Gazette.

It turns out his new job is paying substantially more than his last job, so yay for that. I just hope they don't decide they have so much money they can move out and get a bigger place, I like having neighbours I can trust and get on well with, especially with their sharing the same house, just on different floors. I'd hate to have someone I didn't trust living downstairs, with just a plank of wooden floorboard between us.

Yeah, let's hope they stay.

Sunday, January 20th to Saturday, January 26th 2019

I'm having some issues with one of my New Year's resolutions, and I think I'm going to use my diary as a bit of a sounding board. I

know I said I wasn't going to tell you what it is, but you know what, I'm going to do it for sure, I just need to think about it here.

OK, so, what it is. I want to do a *big* investigative report, one that really makes a difference, in the same way the Reaction Engines story did. That was what, almost four years ago now, and so I want something huge to get my teeth into.

I've been thinking about it for a while, and the one thing that could be as big, if not bigger, is if I could find out how Argentina took out RAF Mount Pleasant last year. I have no idea, and I'm sure that MI5 is looking into it, but there have been no announcements. Maybe they already know, and they aren't saying for political reasons, but I'd like to do an investigation and break the truth.

I have two problems though. First, I work for a local paper, not a massive corporation with a huge budget to send reporters all round the world. Second, and more important, I have no idea, no idea at all, where to start.

I have my suspicions. I reckon it was the States, they sold the bomb to Argentina in exchange for oil. I reckon they were so desperate for better oil prices that they'd do almost anything to get their hands on the South American oil supply, and if that meant a bomb goes to the enemies of their ally, who cares. The evidence is pointing to them, there are only a small number of countries that have ever produced a fuel-air bomb of that magnitude, and the US fits the bill exactly. From my reading, the damage pretty much exactly matches up with the expected blast yield from an American MOAB, so either it's an amazing coincidence, or that's exactly the type of bomb it was.

Obviously I can't prove it, and I can just imagine the shitstorm if I could, but I want to try and do it. I want to see if I'm good enough to find the answer, or if I'm a middle-rate journalist who'll spend his life reporting on the feeds, doing local investigations, and who got lucky on his first year in the job before fading into obscurity.

That might be me. I mean, there are thousands of reporters, but very few are household names, and I bet most of us plan to be huge successes. Nobody goes into a career planning to be mediocre. So I want to find out, was I lucky, or do I have the potential to be brilliant.

So far, as I haven't got a clue where to begin researching, I'm looking worriedly at the ominous 'mediocre' title heading in my

direction.

So yeah, that's my plan. That's what I'll be aiming for over the next few months, to try and work out what happened in the Falklands.

I hope I'm not overreaching myself, I really do. I should probably start smaller, but I know I'll be more motivated to find an answer to a puzzle when I want the answer personally for myself, instead of just for the sake of the job.

On Monday the big news was that the BBC is planning to launch a full range of 3D channels in three month's time. On April 26th, the entire BBC channel range will be broadcast in 3D for anyone that can receive it, free of charge.

I'm fairly neutral about that, I mean, 3D is good for films, but the news in 3D is just a 3D presenter in a studio, except of course for the on location reports, some of those in 3D could be cool. I expect they won't do most of the films and soaps they show in 3D either, not that I watch any of the soaps, and only a few of the films, so I don't care that much. Truth be told, my TV can already do most things in 3D, it has a mode that tries to estimate a 3D layout and builds a model in real time. It works quite well, but I never use it, mainly because I really don't care. The only time I care is for films, where I'll go for 3D each and every time.

I got home Monday evening to find a letter from the court, I've been summoned to be a witness at the end of the month in the trial of the people who polluted the Thames.

Great, just what I need. I recorded everything I did, can't they just play the recordings and leave me alone, I don't see how anything I say will add to the proceedings compared to a recording of the events.

The middle of the week was pleasantly quiet. I spent some time in Kidlington, the town just to the north of Oxford, talking to the residents about a rare bird that had been seen in the park at the southern end of their town. Most of the residents were so completely nonplussed about it, too full of their own concerns and worries to care about a sighting of a rare bird, that I gave it up as a bad job and went back to Oxford. I'd hoped to get a local angle of caring residents building bird facilities with love of nature in their hearts, but instead I

just wrote the article as a general endangered species story. Not quite what I was after, but you have to accept these little setbacks sometimes.

On Thursday, I met Miranda after work for a Starbucks again. It's becoming a rather pleasant regular thing. We talked about her astronomy again over coffee. She's been building her own tracking computer to control her telescope, which impressed me rather a lot. A girl with technical and science ability, where are the handcuffs, don't let this one get away!

No, get your mind out of there, I didn't mean handcuffs in that kind of way, I just meant to stop her escaping.

Although, on the other hand... :-)

I think she liked that I was genuinely interested in her astronomy, I made a flirtatious suggestion that she should invite me round one day to see it, and she grinned, and said she just might do that. I grinned back and we carried on with coffee and chat.

At about 6, as we were leaving, I decided to see how receptive she was to the stage beyond coffee.

'You know, I've got absolutely nothing in my freezer right now, I said. Do you fancy going and grabbing some food later this evening, after you've looked after Snowflake?' - that's her cat's name.

'Yeah, I could do with an evening out, something nice to eat,' she replied. 'What're you in the mood for?'

I suggested Chinese, it's almost always a safe bet, everyone likes Chinese. Well, almost everyone, that was a strike, she stuck her tongue out and made a bleurging noise.

'Hows about Indian?' she asked.

Doh, strike 2, I used to like Indian, but since having half of my face burned off, I've had a bit of an aversion to spicy food. It just feels a lot spicier than it used to, probably the nerves in my mouth were affected by the bomb, as it's only on the left side that I find it too hot. It's weird, I know, but that's how it is.

'Italian?' I suggested, last ditch attempt.

'Yeah, that works for me,' she smiled.

‘About 7:30?’

‘Meet you at the train station then,’ she said.

And there we had it, booked on our first dinner. I jumped on a train home, and made a booking from my pad at a decent Italian in Oxford, and quickly headed home to beautify myself.

Obviously, within certain limitations, there’s only so much beautification I can do without putting on a Phantom of the Opera mask, which would make eating difficult, but I did my best. I grabbed a quick shower, and put on some good clothes, an actual shirt and decent shoes, instead of the jeans and T-shirt style of dress I always wear at work. The big benefit of having my head shaved of course, is that I don’t have to wait for my hair to dry, which really saves time. I was back on a train at five past seven, and back in Oxford for twenty past.

Last thing I wanted to do was be late.

Of course, Miranda exercised female privilege and was five minutes late. It was expected, I’d have been surprised if she wasn’t. She apologised, and I pretended to not have noticed, the usual dance of people who’re trying to make a good impression on each other. Once that was done, we walked down the street to the Italian, which was nice and close by.

We talked about my Thames case over dinner. Probably not the best dinner conversation, with discussions of death and poison, but I think we both found the irony quite amusing. Obviously I didn’t go into the gore of the situation, the bodies of pets and wildlife, but the conversation was more about the hunt and the solving of the mystery. I forget how we even got onto it now. Oh, no, wait, I do remember, it’s cos I was saying I had to be in court on Monday, so I’d best not spill anything on my good trousers, as I wouldn’t have a chance to get them dry cleaned again before then. And then of course she asked why I was in court, and so the Thames discussion started.

The restaurant deserved its reputation for good food. I’d never eaten there before, Taima was never a huge Italian fan, but I’d always heard it was a nice place. I had a Lasagne, but Miranda broke the cardinal rule of going out for dinner, and ordered spaghetti. Impressively, she handled it like a master. Not a single slurp, not a single dangled strand out of her mouth, it was quite amazing. I know I

wouldn't have been brave enough to risk it!

After food, I walked her back to her house, we hugged, and then I headed to the train station. Keep it nice and slow, I don't want to mess things up, I'm really quite enjoying our talks, so last thing I want to do is rush her, or myself truth be told. I don't want to end up making another mistake like last time.

Friday at work, though, I was furious. Absolutely furious. No, not at Miranda, at Starbucks!

Starbucks suspected of subliminal online advertising

International coffee chain Starbucks has been accused by the hacking group Anonymous of using subliminal advertising in their internet banner ads across the web.

Computer security specialists around the world have been rushing to analyse the accusation, and in the last hour, the government's Advertising Standards Authority has confirmed that their investigation shows significant amounts of subliminal suggestion in Starbucks advertising since the 3rd of December last year.

Starbucks has immediately denied the claims, stating that advertising is often carried out by individual affiliates, and that no central Starbucks advert would ever contain subliminal messages.

Subliminal advertising has long been banned on television. It works by flashing messages or images across our TVs or web browsers, which last so briefly that the conscious mind cannot perceive the message, but the subconscious can.

Subliminal messaging has little effect on changing people's minds entirely, but has been shown to be extremely effective in providing a slight nudge in the direction a viewer was already considering heading in. As the Starbucks advertising has apparently been designed to increase the desire for a cup of Starbucks brand coffee, it can easily be seen how a subliminal message could turn the thought of "I'd like some coffee" into "I'd like some coffee now", or "I'd like a cup of

coffee” to “I’d like a cup of Starbucks coffee”.

The Advertising Standards Agency has demanded more information from advertisers as to exactly who paid for and placed the adverts, and has pledged to bring the culprits to justice either by means of domestic law, if they are found to be in the UK, or using international law to ensure a conviction in their country of residence.

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And so yeah, I was angry. I’d been drinking at Starbucks since the start of the month, and I’d been thinking ‘hey, their coffee has gotten a lot better’. I don’t even usually drink coffee, I prefer tea! I’ve been subliminally influenced to spend money in somewhere I wouldn’t usually spend it, I almost always used to go to Costa for my tea.

So yeah, furious was definitely the right emotion. It was all the discussion throughout the office, loads of us had been going to Starbucks more often than usual. I talked to Miranda about it over lunch in the canteen, and we were both pretty pissed off, although, on the other hand, it *had* made us both want to go get coffee together, so we did agree it was a good thing on that basis.

Yes, it was bad, it was actually borderline evil, but, I think I like the end result it’s brought about.

Sunday, January 27th to Saturday, February 2nd 2019

The weekend wasn’t too relaxing for me. I did a lot of pacing to and fro around my flat, wondering just what would happen at the trial. I’d never been in a witness box before, I’d seen Taima in one a few years ago, but that’s the only time I’ve ever even been in a courtroom.

On Monday I was at Oxford Crown Court early, and met with the court official who told me what to expect and where to wait. So, I waited where I was told, and read the news on my pad as it was coming in. There wasn’t much of interest, well not of interest to me

anyway, but I was more just reading to distract myself.

After about four hours in the waiting room, the court official came in and told me I wouldn't be needed. The two defendants had changed their plea to guilty.

I nodded, and checked that that was it, I wouldn't be needed any more tomorrow or anything. I was told no, it was all done, I could go home and wouldn't need to come back.

What a monumental waste of time that had all turned out to be. They could have pleaded guilty in advance, and saved me all the waiting around and boredom. I guess they wanted to see if they could get away with it, but decided to give up in the end. I can't blame them for not wanting to be locked up, I mean, who would? I'm glad they saw sense in the end, it saved me from having to go stand in that witness box.

The rest of the week was again suspiciously news-free. I'm starting to expect something big is going to happen soon. It doesn't ever stay this quiet for this long.

I did another polling article on Wednesday. It seems Wednesdays are polling days. We get one from Gallup every second week on that day, so I should probably be prepared to beat other people to the regular newsworthy information. The one I did this week was accepted merely because I was first to the editors.

Polling hadn't changed much, Science was down by one, UKIP was down by one, Labour was up by two, so only small changes. That's another Labour gain though. It's just over three months till the election, and at this rate, they could possibly even challenge the Tories.

In fact, yeah, they've just gained two percent in two weeks, they're twelve percent behind, and there are thirteen weeks till the election. They could do it, if they keep going at this rate.

Thursday was the day I'd been looking forwards to, and Miranda and I went out after work again. This time we went to Costa and I drank tea, though she stuck with coffee. Starbucks was absolutely deserted as we walked past it. I guess a lot of people were pissed off at being manipulated like that.

She surprised me by telling me she didn't have to go home to look after her cat, as she'd made arrangements for her sister to come over and look after her, so she wouldn't have to skip half the evening. I thought that that was nice, and so we didn't need to rush anywhere.

We ate at a place neither of us had been to before, a Nepalese restaurant. The main food was these dumplings apparently called momo. They weren't bad, and thankfully only very lightly spiced, although there were spicier options up for grabs, and Miranda did order some of those for herself. They were meat filled, and came with this rather peculiar dipping sauce that I'm not actually sure if I liked or not.

Either way, I'd call it a success, except for new food nervousness.

After eating, we'd decided to see a film. It has the weight of tradition behind it, and as far as dates go, it's nice and unassuming. We looked at what was on, and in the end settled on Jurassic Park 5. It was a safe bet, in that we'd both seen 1-4 and liked them, and so either 5 was something that we'd both like, or if it was terrible, we'd both be able to make fun of it after it finished.

Thankfully it was good. I didn't do anything cheesy like try and put my arm round her in the film, I mean, I'm not a teenager any more, but she did end up with her arm linked through mine on the chair arm between us, which was a nice thing.

Taking courage from that, I kept arms linked as we walked out of the cinema, and she didn't move to change the situation, so, I took that as a good sign.

OK, I don't have tons of experience at this kind of thing, so I was being really cautious. In my whole life I've been involved with three people before this, and one of those was Anice and she doesn't really count. Taima and I had just kindof drifted together, and the first ex, well, the less said about that the better. I'd never actually had to do the 'dating' thing so knowing what to do and when to do it was kindof hard. I confess I even went as far as reading things online to get some guidance.

For some people it all just comes naturally, but I admit I'm a bit socially awkward, so I need a little help sometimes. I'm not a complete disaster, but I can say the wrong thing and make the wrong

assumption on occasion.

As before, I walked her back to her house. This time we parted with a kiss on the cheek and a brief handhold. I was massively nervous beforehand, I knew she wouldn't object, but in my heart of hearts I was paranoid about maybe I'd completely misread the whole situation and I'd get a slap and an awkward silence at work from there on in. But no, it was reciprocated, and I felt like I'd just dodged a bullet or something, my heart was racing so fast.

All in all, I'm taking this as a really good sign that things are going OK. Not just with her, but with me too. I mean, yes, it's been more than two years since Taima died, but, I still sometimes think of her and miss her, and I wonder if I'm ready for something new. I worry that maybe I won't feel anything, or won't feel the right thing for someone new. But, I think, I hope, that I may just be being paranoid, because it seems OK so far. It feels - it feels normal and good, and how it should feel. I think.

Friday at work, we exchanged smiles as we passed in the office, and slight gestures of a split second of hand holding, that kind of thing. Nothing overt, I don't think either of us wanted to cause a scene at work, but just tiny things that made the day better.

In the afternoon, I had my new article on the Science Party.

Science Party entices voters with foreign aid policy

The Science Party has today announced their new policy on foreign aid, announcing a proposal for a new method of providing assistance to the needy countries in less affluent areas of the world.

For years, foreign aid has been a vote loser, as so many voters rebel against handing over hard earned cash to foreign governments, who often just squander the money, or divert it to military spending, or new palaces for dictators. It isn't hard to see why the British public often feels that the money is badly spent.

The Science Party has announced that they will stop all cash payouts to foreign countries, and instead will assign all aid budgets to provide

specific projects, which will all be run by British companies.

This will mean that instead of handing a country a million pounds to improve their water infrastructure, and watch as no benefits end up with the general public of that country, while the leader's palace gets a nice new fountain, we will pay a British company a million pounds to send workers to the area, and build specific infrastructure improvements.

This should lead to a double benefit. Firstly with the money being spent where it is actually needed, and with no way of filtering the finances off to other areas, it will ensure that the aid goes on exactly what it should be spent on. Secondly, it should give a big boost to British industry, who will be able to bid for an extra £16 billion in new projects from the government, an opportunity bound to give significant growth to the economy.

Conservative ministers have ridiculed the idea, saying it would be too complex to organise, but opinions from the public so far have been positive in immediate polling conducted after the announcement.

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Yeah, the 'immediate polling after the announcement' was me walking out of the office and asking a half dozen people on the street outside what they thought of the idea. It was six out of six who liked the idea, so I'd say that that's a positive reaction.

Sunday, February 3rd to Saturday, February 9th 2019

I spent a lot of the weekend sitting around twiddling my thumbs, trying to get a spark of inspiration for how to go about my planned Falklands investigation. NewCat enjoys it when I twiddle my thumbs. I've discovered that she takes it as a sign to pounce on my hands. CoNN is a lot more practical, he only pounces if I have food in my hands.

I suspect he may just be lazier, not cleverer.

No real inspiration came, so I went to bed Sunday night feeling a bit unfulfilled and frustrated.

I worked off as much of my frustration at the gym as I could in the morning. I keep almost quitting going there, but then I think it's probably good for me, keeps me healthy when I don't get a lot of other exercise. I don't think wandering aimlessly round Oxford and surrounding towns counts as exercise, and that's about all I do except for sit at my desk all day.

Tuesday was a good day. The news was slow, so I'd done an article on the decline of local butterflies (yes, it was as exciting as it sounds), and was ready to skip off home early. The weather forecast was full of rain and I didn't want to get caught in it on the way home. Don't get me wrong, I like rain, but I don't especially like winter rain, it's way too cold.

At least it wasn't planning to snow, but give it time, I expect it'll get round to it before the end of winter.

I stopped by Miranda's desk on the way past just to say goodbye, and she was packing up too. We walked out to the car park together, and I asked if she was heading home cos she was bored, or if she had plans.

She replied that she'd finished all of her articles for the day, and so was heading home. She'd found it as quiet a day as I had, and so we both had the same idea, get home before the rain.

I quickly checked the weather on my pad, and it was showing still a good hour before the rain actually started, and so I suggested a quick trip to Costa before home, and she seemed to like the idea.

I had a giant tea, and Miranda had a normal sized coffee. Since I realised I'd been duped into drinking coffee, I've gone right off it again, I'm sticking with tea from now on. It's not that I hate coffee, I just prefer tea, and I'm being grumpy about the whole subliminal advertising thing.

We talked about cats as we drank. I'd seen hers briefly when I was at her place after the Christmas party, and she'd obviously never seen mine. I told her how CoNN was the cat version of me, with a

missing eye and all kinds of bits broken after his car accident. She laughed at that. Apparently her Snowflake was a present when she was a kid, and is getting on in years now. She'd got her when she was 13, and now Snowflake was 13 herself.

That gave me the opportunity to ask when Miranda's birthday was, as it's something that had never come up. Turns out it's October the 2nd, which was good, plenty of time to get to know each other before I have to worry about things like that. I told her mine, and I wondered if she was thinking the same thing, August is quite a way away still too.

I checked the forecast again and it was looking like the rain was starting to close in, so we decided to call it a day and I walked her back to the car park.

We didn't quite make it, before it started to rain heavily, and we took shelter under one of the trees that lined the side of the road. Before two minutes had passed, it was thundering loudly and lightning was coming down. Miranda loved it, she whooped and jumped out into the rain. I like thunderstorms, but I guess she likes them a bit more than I do!

She twirled around in the rain and lightning and I couldn't help but laugh. She grabbed my hand and dragged me out into it as I laughed, and before I really knew it we were out there in the pouring rain and thunder and lightning, kissing for the first time.

It was definitely one of those electrical moments, and not just because of the storm. Despite the fact half of my lips are gone and I can't drink without a straw, I can still manage to kiss perfectly well. I was soaked, my coat isn't the most waterproof, and so was she, but we were having too much fun to care.

We had to remember we were in the middle of town though, and we stopped to catch our breath, and looked round, blushing a little as we were still in public, and there were people walking by in the rain. They were all being very British though, and they were all huddling under their umbrellas, and pretending that they couldn't see us.

'Come on,' she said a bit breathlessly, 'my car, just in the car park.'

So we headed for that, at a brisk run through the rain. It was only a half a minute to get there. 'Get in,' she shouted through another thunderclap, and we both dived into the dry.

We laughed some more, and caught our breaths, as she started up the engine, and pulled out of the car park.

We went straight to her place, another mad dash from the car to her front door, we were already soaked so it didn't really matter.

Once inside we both collapsed against the wall in the hallway, and kissed again.

'You should get out of those wet clothes,' she said.

'I think you're wetter than I am,' I replied.

'I think you're right there.'

We both laughed, and let the next couple of hours take us where the mood demanded. It was a bit awkward at times, as it often is for people getting to know each other in that way, but we ended in a very satisfactory way for the both of us.

Later, I dropped Simon and Gerald an email asking if they could feed the cats, and then Miranda and I went out for the evening. We ate at a Turkish place, I didn't like the look of a lot of what was on the menu, but they served steak, and that always works. I ordered a fairly large one, and it was one of the best steaks I've ever had in my life. I'll definitely go there again.

After that, I discovered that Miranda seems to be a bit of a music freak, well, not freak freak, but you know what I mean, and she wanted to go to see a live band that was playing in one of the student pubs in town. I had no reason not to, I'm not a huge one for music, but I don't hate it or anything, so I agreed, and we headed off to see this new and upcoming band that she'd heard about from a friend, who were apparently called 'Skint Narcotics', which I thought was a strange name, but they weren't bad. The bassist was especially good, although his bright red mohican made him look like a thug. Miranda seemed to definitely enjoy herself, although thankfully there was no dance area in the pub, which was a huge relief, as I have three left feet when it comes to dancing.

I stuck mostly to cokes all evening, but Miranda was a bit merry by the time we left. Not even close to how bad she was after the party, but still, a small amount of weaving as she walked. It was within the limits of what I'd consider OK for a night out, if only barely. I don't like the idea of going out and getting plastered for fun, I never saw the point in getting so drunk you forget what happened the whole evening

and wake up in a puddle of puke. I mean, you forget the fun you had and you end up in a horrible place, how's that enjoyable? I crossed my fingers that this wasn't a light evening for Miranda, and she wasn't the kind to lose most Friday evenings, but I guess only time will tell.

We took a cab back to her place, and carried on getting to know each other, until we fell asleep sometime past midnight.

Wednesday morning, we woke up together and grinned. It had been a good night. We had the obligatory next morning chat and we were both very happy with the way the night had gone, neither of us were planning on doing a runner, although I realised I *would* have to run before work.

I took the train for the fifteen minutes back to Didcot, checked the cats were OK, got changed, had a quick shower, and got the train right back into Oxford. I was a bit late into the office, but nobody seemed to care. I grinned at Miranda as I walked past. We'd had the conversation in advance about being distant at work, and we'd agreed it was for the best for a more professional working atmosphere. Still, we could pass a smile between ourselves, it wouldn't kill anyone.

As if to make my mood even better than it already was, I had a space article to run on Wednesday. It was the SLS/Orion manned Moonshot.

Orion takes to the skies in first manned mission

The NASA Space Launch System lifted the first manned Orion capsule into space in the early hours of this morning, from the Cape Canaveral launch facility in Florida.

Orion is the new crew capsule that is designed to take Americans to the Moon and beyond for the next generation of American space flight, and has been in development for the last fourteen years.

Last year, an Orion capsule was successfully sent around the Moon on autopilot, and today's launch will be the start of a six day mission that will take Americans back into Lunar orbit for the first time in

over forty years.

Mission commander Joe Lashley, a former air force pilot and veteran of three ISS missions aboard Soyuz launchers, said in the press briefing that he was 'honoured to be representing the future of space travel for his country.'

After orbiting the Moon, the three astronauts aboard the craft are expected to come back to Earth on Tuesday the 12th, at 4am UK time.

NASA's online video streaming service will be following the mission, and you will be able to see the Moonshot broadcast live via a communications relay that the Orion will deploy before it heads to the far side of the Moon.

If the mission goes to plan, NASA has said they plan to launch a manned mission to land back on the Moon late next year.

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I assume I missed the call for my seat on the rocket, I know they must have wanted me, you always need a good reporter on a space trip, it's just common sense.

No? Fine.

I spent Wednesday night in my own house. CoNN told me off quite extensively for being away overnight. He's an antisocial git most of the time, but he doesn't like his routine to be changed, and that involves me being home in the evening. I got yowled at, and he bit me, just a little bite, to let me understand his displeasure. I didn't enjoy being bitten, so he was put back down on the floor when he did that, and he grumped off to lie on the beanbag again.

Thursday I had the day off and I was back up to Birmingham for my next hair appointment. I won't go into it in great detail, you know what happens in there, it's all pain and bleeding and ickyness. Kindof like watching Channel 5 TV really.

They did the front of my head this time, so now I just have the side to go, a patch above my ear about the area that I can cover with my hand. They've booked me in to do that final bit in April. I can't wait, I really can't, just two more months, and then a month to let it start growing, and I can finally start letting my hair grow again. It's going to be awesome. It's also going to save me a ton of time, as I have to spend a good amount of time each week to keep my hair all shaved, and I'll get all that time back, which will be nice. A bit longer in bed in the morning :-)

At least this time, when I went to bed that night I could lie on my back. That was a definite improvement from the previous implantations where I had to sleep on my face and try and not suffocate during the night.

Sunday, February 10th to Saturday, February 16th 2019

I hadn't really seen much of Miranda since our first night together, what with having to go to Birmingham and stuff, but we'd arranged to see each other on Sunday. I think we were both being careful not to smother the other, being sure to give each other space to breathe.

We spent the morning going on a tour of the Diamond Light synchrotron, the UK's only particle accelerator, conveniently located just outside of Didcot. It was a pretty impressive place, although I think I enjoyed myself more than Miranda did. It basically works by having a beam of electrons accelerated to close to the speed of light, and then passed into a tunnel, kind of like the LHC, but with electrons instead of the much heavier protons. It's also a fair bit smaller than the LHC too, just over 550 metres circumference instead of 27km, however, for the job it does, it doesn't need to be bigger.

And of course, size isn't everything...

Unlike the LHC, which fires its protons in an exact circle, Diamond deliberately uses straight lines, and then uses powerful magnets to change the direction, resulting in a 24 sided shape, and

each time the magnets cause the electrons to change direction, synchrotron radiation is emitted. That's just a fancy name for *how* it's emitted, it's really just high intensity electromagnetic waves, such as X-rays or infra red or pretty much anything they want to use.

I picked all that up from the tour, I think I sound like I really know what I'm talking about.

We went out for lunch after visiting Diamond, which involved much ice cream. I know, it's the middle of winter, and pretty cold outside, but we were eating inside, so it didn't really matter.

We spent the afternoon at my place, introducing Miranda to NewCat. Obviously CoNN wasn't going to be polite, and he hid under the bed.

Miranda told me off for having such rubbish cat names, and said I should rename them, but I declined. She said she may just come up with new names without my help, and so I tickled her till she gave in.

At about 5pm we went back to her place, she wanted to show me her telescope, but didn't want to be out too late with it due to how cold it was late in the evenings. I can't say I blame her, it *is* very cold right now.

It was quite impressive, I was expecting a little thing, but it was a proper telescope, a 30cm reflector. She'd even got a mini observatory set up in a converted shed. It was pretty cool stuff. We spent some time with her showing me stars, and features on the Moon. She said she'd have liked to show me some of the planets, but every single one of them was in a bad position right now. That was a bit disappointing. I'd wanted to see Jupiter and Saturn, but Jupiter wouldn't be visible at night for another couple of months, and Saturn not until some time in May, due to them both being at the wrong part of their orbit for the moment.

Stupid Solar System, do as you're told.

I stayed there overnight, but I'd planned ahead and had fresh clothes for work and my toothbrush with me, so I didn't need to nip home. We decided that when we got to the office, I'd jump out of the car and walk in from couple of minutes away, so people at work wouldn't gossip. We knew they'd work it out in the end, but we both

wanted to avoid it as much as possible for now.

The plan seemed to work, and there was no gossip. The office seemed happily oblivious to our private lives, and we were happy to keep it that way.

Tuesday, and I got up really early in the morning to do an article on the Orion capsule coming back to Earth. I'd slept through the actual Moonshot on Saturday, which had annoyed me. I'd wanted to watch the moonshot most of all, but failing that, I watched the splashdown, and took a video of it just in case the paper wanted to use the video with the story.

It apparently landed a little off course, and so it took a while for the recovery boats to get there, but there were helicopters on site pretty quickly, and we all knew from the internal cameras that the astronauts were just fine.

NASA explained that the landing off course was caused by a modification in the heat shield that hadn't been factored in to the descent path. It sounded a bit of a problem to me, if they can forget to take that into account, what else could they forget? Let's hope next time they launch the SLS, they don't forget to put fuel in, or to close the door, or something a bit more serious.

On Wednesday I didn't have to get up quite so early to get my story, but I still had to be up sooner than I'd have liked to beat everyone else to the article. I was writing about the new polling numbers for the election, and I got a few grumpy looks from people when I got the article for the third time in a row. The figures came in showing Conservative 42%, Labour 30%, UKIP 11%, Lib Dems 3%, Science 6%, undecided 6%, other 2%, and so it looked like the Science Party had gained a bit of ground from their announcement on foreign aid spending. I think it shows a lot of people aren't against foreign aid, they're just against it being wasted by dictators. Science is still never going to win, but they're making a good fight of it. Maybe they can force their way into a coalition and do a better job than the Lib Dems did.

UKIP was up again, which makes me a sad panda. I don't like all their talk of isolationism. I don't care how they phrase it, that's what it is, isolationism and xenophobia. The sooner we realise we're all one

human race, the sooner we'll have a much more peaceful planet. It also looks like the Lib Dems have finally managed to scoop up a few new voters, although I don't know how. They haven't been doing a whole lot of advertising, rumour is they can't afford it after a load of their backers deserted them last year over their suggestion of Falklands capitulation.

Amanda dug her way through the crowd on the train on Thursday morning, and thanked me for introducing Gerald to her. It seems he's more than earned his bacon, and she won her case pretty much based on his analysis. She told me he's been taken on full time, which I was polite enough to not mention he'd already told me.

I said I was glad to help, but I admit I was a bit distracted as I'd meant to be a bit earlier into work as it was Valentines day and I thought I'd probably better get something for Miranda. I'd been late due to my wonderful CoNN cat deciding to be a pukecat that morning, and I'd missed the early train after clearing up the mess.

Sometimes I really hate cats. I really do.

I decided to make full use of my ability to spend time in town interviewing locals, and went Valentines day shopping instead. My big problem is, I had absolutely no idea what to buy her. Taima didn't like Valentines day and so this is, at the age of 27, my first Valentines shopping mission.

I decided to stick with the traditional, and buy some roses. All of the cards and gifts were full of 'I love you' messages, and to be frank, I think it's a little early in the relationship for the L word. I like her a lot, but love takes a lot longer to develop. Except when it doesn't, of course.

I bought two of them, one for each week since that first thunderstormy kiss, which is when I at least take as the official start of the relationship. It's not actually two weeks, in fact it's barely more than one week, but it's now in the second week, so I went for two.

I thought buying just one would make me look like a skinflint. On the other hand, at £18 each, buying two makes me look like a mug.

Miranda and I met up after work, and went out to see a Valentines

day film. From the smile I got, I was right to get two roses. Hooray, I did it right for once!

We watched 'Just the next best', a new chick flick which I wasn't overly keen on, but Miranda liked it, so again, I got it right. Twice in one day is quite quite unheard of. I'd better go and sit down before success goes to my head.

It was a clear cold night, so we wandered in the park after the film, and Miranda named stars for me. I don't remember any of them, but we enjoyed ourselves.

We finished the night with a drive back to my place, and a bit more time getting to know each other before sleep.

On Friday we got the latest insanity from the American government. Once again, over Democrat's objections, the Republican party had used its complete control of government to force through one of their most dearly held anti-science policies. As of the start of the next academic year, in a few month's time, all schools will be forced to teach creationism in science classes as an equally valid alternative to evolution.

It seems that American politicians don't understand the word theory as it's used in scientific circles. They seem to think that the Theory of Evolution is a half-baked idea that a few people thought up one night while they were drinking beer and listening to bad music, instead of the Theory of Evolution being a rigorously examined statement which has passed all known experimental tests, and is as close to a fact as something you can't actually force to happen under your control in a laboratory.

To give evolution and creationism equal footing in a classroom is the same as to ascribe equal medical value to antibiotics and baked beans.

But that's what the Americans are stuck with for the next what, 18 months until the next US election. I really hope that the US public has had enough by now, surely they've suffered this insanity for long enough.

Even with this happening, I went home on Friday evening in a good mood. I'd booked a week off some time ago, and I was planning to enjoy it!

Saturday, I had a long long lie in, and didn't get up till after midday. When I finally had to, I crawled out of bed, made myself some Weetabix, and flopped on the sofa with the cats for the rest of the day.

I spent some time tormenting them by making my pad play cat meowing sounds, and they couldn't work out what was going on. I can be so mean sometimes, but they were so funny as they cocked their heads trying to understand what the pad was saying to them.

I'm soooo looking forwards to next week. No work, no commitments, just relaxing, napping, films, and hopefully see Miranda once or twice.

Yay for weeks off.

Sunday, February 17th to Saturday, February 23rd 2019

I almost wish I'd have gone into work this week, there would have been no shortage of articles to write. But then, I enjoyed not having to, which is just as it should be when on holiday for the week.

The cool one happened on Monday, when Virgin Volcanic sent its first unmanned vehicle into a volcano. It was lowered into the Erta Ale volcano in Ethiopia, which was apparently chosen because of its reliable lava lake and its low elevation, meaning it was easier to lift the *Spock 1* volcanic probe into position.

In the end, it was a good job that *Spock 1* was unmanned. After about ten minutes under the lava, during which time we got some awesome glowy red pictures, all contact was lost shortly after the onboard sensors detected a lava incursion into the central passenger cabin area.

It probably would have harmed future bookings if it had been a manned mission and fried its first passengers.

Miranda came round on Tuesday evening, as she wanted to watch an astronomy documentary, and said that I was good company. She also admitted that, as she only had 2D at home, my TV was better than hers. It made me laugh, at least she's honest.

She made a few comedic complaints in the morning when she had to get up and go to work, and I didn't have to go anywhere. I'm sure the situation will be reversed at some point later in the year, and I'll pay for my laughter, but for now, I was content for her to have to get up, get dressed, and struggle into work while I lounged in bed and watched.

Friday I was glad as anything I wasn't at work, because I knew I'd have had to write the article on it, because no buggler else would do it. Spain, which had been suffering from massive unemployment, over 50%, defaulted on its debts and exited the EU, just as Greece had done a couple of years ago.

This was quite a bit more serious than the default of Greece, who'd owed around 600bn Euros. The total debt mountain of Spain was closer to five times that amount, and over 100bn was owed to the UK. Our government didn't take it at all as well as they'd taken the Greek default, mainly because, I suspect, the Greeks had owed us close to nothing. I checked online, just to see how much we owed them in return, and actually, we owe Spain more than Spain owes us. It seems strange to me, why don't we just cancel our debt to them, offset it against their debt to us, and we won't have to care?

Obviously it isn't that simple, I just have no idea why. I guess that's why I'm not an economist, and I'm a journalist instead.

France and Germany were once again the ones screaming loudest, with many billions of Euros owed to them by Spain. It was again Germany's insistence that led to Spain exiting the EU. Spain, like Greece before it, didn't actually choose to leave, but were firmly pushed.

I did sit and watch all this on TV, but not having to write about it meant I could sit there and not have to learn all the ins and outs of the situation. It was really nice.

Saturday morning, Miranda came round for the day. She seemed a bit delicate when she arrived, and she said she'd been out at a club last night, and had a bit of a hangover. It was my duty, therefore, to make a nice breakfast that would make the hangover go away. I did my best, but my best in the culinary arts isn't that good. I expect NewCat could have done better, but it was mostly edible. I'd cooked

the breakfast in the wrong order, and so the bacon was cold, and the eggs were burned because I'd been paying attention to the mushrooms, but apart from that, it didn't seem to be too much of a disaster.

After we'd forced the food down, we got round to having a nice relaxing day chilling together. We didn't do anything much, just lounged around the house chatting, playing with the cats, having a laugh.

It was a great way to round off my week's holiday, no stress, no pressure, just good company.

Sunday, February 24th to Saturday, March 2nd 2019

Sunday wasn't as relaxing as the previous week, because I knew it was back to work the next day. To distract myself I read through the first Albus Potter book again, which worked quite well, and killed a good few hours until bedtime. I'm really missing having a games console to be honest, and I don't know if I can wait till the PS5 comes out. I don't want to waste my money though. After having the hair replacement treatment, and some random spending, my bank balance has gone from £40,000 to £21,000 in the last two years. OK so 15 of the 19 down is because of the hair, but still, it's a bit worrying. That's the main reason I'm a little cautious, I don't want to be running out.

On Monday, I did my article on the latest development in the Royal Navy

HMS Queen Elizabeth receives her planes

The Royal Navy's new aircraft carrier, *HMS Queen Elizabeth*, which has been undergoing sea trials for the last 18 months, has today received her delivery of 40 F35 Lightning-2 planes from the Royal Air Force, which has been trialling them from RAF Marham in Norfolk.

The F35, which has been plagued with production problems, cost

overruns, and delays, was finally declared airworthy in 2016, after a 20 year development program. The first deliveries to the RAF were made in 2012, but these aircraft were subject to constant updating as problems were resolved.

HMS *Queen Elizabeth* has finished her sea trials for seaworthiness, and will enter service into the navy later this year, given a successful trial of her air wing.

The Lightning-2 planes are designed to take off using a short runway, but are capable of landing vertically, like the Harrier before them.

Once fully commissioned into the Royal Navy, HMS *Queen Elizabeth* will become the navy's flagship, taking over from HMS *Ocean*, and will be the largest aircraft carrier afloat, excluding the American carriers.

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The TV shots of the planes finally on the carrier deck were cool. I remember back in 2010 when the whole project was almost cancelled, which would have left us a sorry looking naval superpower if ever there was one. I think the Falklands last year really made the government appreciate how much we need carriers. Sure, we won the fight, but they would have massively helped. If some of those Argentinian air force jets had made it past the anti-air defences of the destroyers, the fleet would have been in a lot of trouble.

Monday evening when I got home, NewCat almost killed me, which I didn't appreciate. Being small and black, she's quite hard to see when she wants to be, and she decided that she was going to hide in some shadows in the hallway, and then pounce my feet as I walked by.

I almost jumped out of my skin, and I fell over face first as I tried to avoid stepping on her. She thought it was great fun, and bounded up to me purring as I lay there in pain on the floor. I resisted the urge to strangle her however, and got up and went to find something for my nice new nosebleed.

Cats. That's all. Just *Cats*.

Wednesday there was new polling for the election, but the changes since the last set of polling were pretty negligible. Conservative 41%, Labour 30%, UKIP 11%, Lib Dems 3%, Science 5%, undecided 8%, other 2%. That amounts to the Tories and the Science Party both losing 1% each to the undecided. I'm sure there was lots more moving around for people, as the parties announced their policies and threw mud at each other, but that's how it ended up. All of their millions spent, and they end up with almost no change.

Still, at least the advertising companies can afford some more champagne now, and that's the most important thing.

The rest of the week was nice and slow. I did some local polling in town myself, and the results I got after a day's work on Friday showed a different local picture for sure. The Tories are up at almost 60%, and Science is over 10%, probably due to the high number of science jobs in the area. Labour has around 20% and the rest of the votes are about evenly split between UKIP, Lib Dems and Greens.

OK, so I only talked to 40 people, but it took quite a while, not many people seemed to be in the mood to talk about their election preferences. It's odd, people will talk to me, knowing I'm a member of the press, about their sex lives, their finances, their health, but ask them who they plan to vote for, and they get all suspicious and start asking why, and what I'm going to use the information for and who I'm working for. Strange.

And on Saturday, I had my breakthrough, I knew how I could start my investigation into the RAF Mount Pleasant bombing.

Sunday, March 3rd to Saturday, March 9th 2019

I paced on Sunday. I paced a lot. I called and cancelled a date with Miranda because I needed to work out the details. She understood, she's a reporter herself, and she knows how it is when you suddenly have a flash of inspiration. I won't say she was pleased to be